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Message Text

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ORIGIN NEA-10

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 AID-05 H-01 SSO-00 INRE-00 NSCE-00
ICAE-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-05 INR-10 L-03 NSAE-00
PA-01 SP-02 SS-15 IO-13 /066 R

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C O N F I D E N T I A L STATE 195966

DAMASCUS FOR CHARGE

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PEPR, EAID, SY, US

SUBJECT: HOUSE VOTE ON FY 79 SSA PROGRAM FOR SYRIA

1. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES VOTED SUBSTANTIALLY (280 TO 103) EVENING AUGUST 2 TO CUT OFF SSA PROGRAM FOR SYRIA IN FY 79. DEPARTMENT MADE STRENUOUS RPT STRENUOUS EFFORTS OVER FINAL WEEK PRECEDING CONSIDERATION AND ON VERY DAY OF VOTE TO FORESTALL ADVERSE ACTION IN HOUSE, INCLUDING PROVISION OF BALANCED BRIEFING AND BACKGROUND MATERIAL TO IMPRESSIVE COALITION OF CONGRESSMEN WHO OPPOSED EFFORTS TO REDUCE OR ELIMINATE SYRIAN PROGRAM (E.G. HAMILTON, OBEY, ZABLOCKI, MOFFET, SOLARZ). YOU SHOULD MAKE CERTAIN THAT SYRIANS UNDERSTAND THAT AUGUST 2 ACTION WAS FOR HOUSE OF CONFIDENTIAL

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REPRESENTATIVES ONLY. ADMINISTRATION WILL CONTINUE ITS EFFORTS ON BEHALF OF SYRIAN PROGRAM TO REVIVE APPROPRIATION IN SENATE AND IN HOUSE/SENATE CONFERENCE COMMITTEE WITH A VIEW TO ACHIEVING RESTORATION OF AS MUCH OF PROPOSED PROGRAM AS POSSIBLE. (FYI: OUR PRELIMINARY ASSESSMENT IS THAT THERE WILL BE REDUCTION IN ORIGINAL LEVEL IN ANY EVENT. END FYI).

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2. YOU OF COURSE ARE IN BEST POSITION TO DECIDE HOW TO PRESENT EXPLANATION TO SYRIAN AUTHORITIES AND WE LEAVE MODALITIES TO YOUR DISCRETION. WE BELIEVE, HOWEVER, THAT IT WOULD BE USEFUL TO CONVEY FEEL FOR FORCES WHICH WERE

OPERATING DURING HOUSE DELIBERATIONS: THERE CONTINUES TO BE CONSIDERABLE FRUSTRATION AMONG CONGRESSMEN REGARDING PEACE PROCESS AND FEELING THAT SYRIA, EVEN WHILE REMAINING COMMITTED TO A COMPREHENSIVE PEACE, HAS NOT PLAYED A HELPFUL ROLE--INDEED HAS PLAYED A SPOILER ROLE--DURING RECENT MONTHS. COUPLED WITH THIS, THERE HAS BEEN RISING TIDE OF CONCERN AND RESENTMENT, STIMULATED BY ALLIES OF THE MARONITE CHRISTIANS IN THIS COUNTRY, OVER WHAT HAS BEEN PORTRAYED AND PERCEIVED AS RECENT INDISCRIMINATE SYRIAN SHELLING OF "CHRISTIANS" IN LEBANON. THESE FACTORS HAVE OPERATED AGAINST A BACKDROP OF CONCERN WITHIN THE CONGRESS TO LIMIT FOREIGN AID SPENDING IN A PERIOD OF DOMESTIC ECONOMIC DIFFICULTIES WHICH HAS RENDERED THE SYRIAN PROGRAM PECULIARLY VULNERABLE AT THIS TIME. YOU MAY, OF COURSE, INFORM YOUR SYRIAN INTERLOCUTORS THAT THE ADMINISTRATION HAS AND WILL CONTINUE TO PROVIDE CONGRESS WITH A BALANCED AND ACCURATE PERSPECTIVE ON THESE ISSUES IN SUPPORTING ITS REQUEST FOR THE SYRIAN SSA PROGRAM.

3. WE WILL BE DISCUSSING THE HOUSE ACTION AND THE PRESENT CONFIDENTIAL

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STATE OF PLAY ON THE FY 79 SYRIAN PROGRAM WITH SYRIAN CHARGE HERE TODAY, AUGUST 3.

4. FOLLOWING IS GUIDANCE PROVIDED AUGUST 3 TO DEPARTMENT SPOKESMAN. BEGIN TEXT: Q. WHAT IS THE DEPARTMENT'S REACTION TO THE HOUSE VOTE TO ELIMINATE THE SYRIAN AID PROGRAM? A. THE ADMINISTRATION CONTINUES TO BELIEVE STRONGLY THAT THERE SHOULD BE A SECURITY SUPPORTING ASSISTANCE PROGRAM FOR SYRIA, AS WE MADE CLEAR IN OUR PRESENTATIONS TO CONGRESS. SYRIA PLAYS AN IMPORTANT ROLE IN THE MIDDLE EAST AND THE U.S. RELATIONSHIP WITH SYRIA IS AN IMPORTANT PART OF OUR POLICY TOWARD THE MIDDLE EAST. WE, OF COURSE, WILL BE CONTINUING OUR CONSULTATIONS WITH CONGRESS ON THE AID BILL, INCLUDING THE PORTION DEALING WITH SYRIA. WE WILL CONTINUE TO URGE THAT THE CONGRESS APPROPRIATE FUNDS FOR THIS PROGRAM. END TEXT. VANCE

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